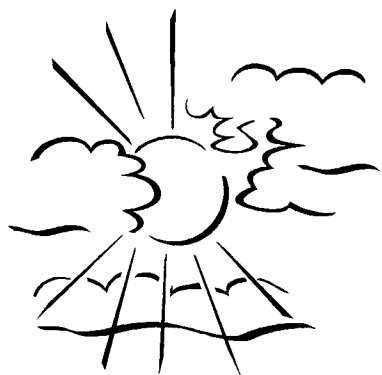


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Wednesday, January 11, 2006

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More of state's kids stay in school

But abuse cases rise, report finds

January 11, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Led by a steep decline in the numbers of juvenile arrests in Detroit during the past decade, a study of the state's 2.5 million children shows that fewer of them are being arrested for property crimes or acts of violence.

The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2005 report being released today also shows that in recent years fewer teens are having babies, dropping out of school or dying compared to the mid-1990s, when problems seemed to peak.

"Of course, we are happy to be able to report good news," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior researcher for the Michigan League for Human Services and coauthor of the annual report.

"But at the same time, we think it's important to highlight that there are lots of issues with kids who are still struggling," she said. "Fourteen thousand kids dropping out of school is not an insignificant number and 13,000 young women who have a baby is not insignificant."

The research is a collaborative project of the Michigan League for Human Services and the advocacy group Michigan's Children.

The data are used to help local, county and state officials make decisions on how to direct resources to improve the health and safety of children, especially disadvantaged youngsters at greater risk for abuse, neglect or delinquency.

The report, which is available online at www.milhs.org, features profiles of child well-being across the state, breaking down statistics for each of the 83 counties and in Detroit.

Zehnder-Merrell and coauthor Michele Corey of Michigan's Children studied data between 1994 and 2004 in a variety of categories, including child health, economic security, child care and early education, births to teenage mothers, arrests of youths ages 10 to 17 and children who are the victims of abuse or neglect.

The study found that in 2004 -- the most recent year of data available -- confirmed cases of child maltreatment statewide were up 40% over 1995 and the rate of children going into foster care was up by 17%.

Jim Nye, the deputy director of field operations for the state Department of Human Services, said more children are entering the child protection system for a variety of reasons.

Nye said that several widely publicized cases of child maltreatment since 2000 have prompted more reports of suspected abuse and neglect to child protective services.

The state also has more clearly defined categories of maltreatment, such as mental injury, medical neglect and improper supervision, Nye said.

And the state has done more training of professionals, such as doctors, nurses and teachers, who are required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

For example, cases of improper supervision swelled from 400 in 1995 to 4,700 in 2005.

"We're seeing more children come to our attention," Nye said. "There has been a whole swelling of community work around early identification and referral. We're saying that if you think

something is happening, please tell us. We'd rather have a report without a preponderance of evidence rather than no report that leaves a child at risk."

Most dramatic is the drop in arrests of youths ages 17 and younger. The numbers are not a true measure of juvenile crime because 17-year-olds who commit crimes are considered adults under state law.

But on average in the mid-1990s, police in Michigan arrested about 3,700 youths each year for violent offenses.

By 2001-03, however, that number had dropped to an average of 1,900 such arrests per year.

In Detroit in 1995 -- at the height of what authorities said was a juvenile crime epidemic -- 1,239 youths were arrested for violent offenses. The number of arrests dropped to just 209 in 2002.

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Wednesday, January 11, 2006

Child abuse in Mich. up 40% over decade Kids Count in Michigan report and children's advocates say new policy directions are needed.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Child well-being

The rate of child maltreatment reports has jumped 40 percent, and the rate of children entering foster care has increased 17 percent since 1995, according to the 2005 Kids Count in Michigan report.

Other highlights of the report:

Arrest and dropout rates dropped by half. About 23,600 youths dropped out of high school in Michigan during the 2003-04 school year.

Teen pregnancy rates declined by one-third. About 12,600 teens between the ages of 15 and 19 gave birth in Michigan in 2003.

Confirmed cases of abused and neglected children in Michigan have jumped 40 percent since 1995, while the number of children who have entered foster care has increased 17 percent, according to the 2005 Kids Count in Michigan report released today.

Children's advocates view the latest data with mixed feelings. They are pleased more children are being taken out of unsafe environments, but they believe the state needs to take a harder look at what it can do to prevent child maltreatment.

With recent state budget woes leading to funding cuts in numerous prevention programs, some advocates are calling on policy-makers to rethink how the programs are funded.

"Unless we really start thinking a little more seriously about some programming and policy directions that have to do with preventing abuse and neglect, this trend will continue," said Michele Corey of Michigan's Children, which collaborated on the Kids Count in Michigan report.

State officials say the jump in the number of abused and neglected children is partly because of better reporting and public awareness of the issue.

Since 2001, the state has also investigated the homes of parents who give birth after they have lost their rights to children to ensure that new babies are in a safe environment.

"When you have more confirmation and substantiation (of child maltreatment), some of these children have to be placed in foster care to ensure their safety," said Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the Department of Human Services, explaining the increase of children in foster care.

The department has increasingly placed these foster children in the homes of relatives "to maintain those family ties that are so essential to a child's overall welfare," Sorbet said.

One out of every four abused or neglected children entering Michigan's foster care system is older than 13. Of those, many will spend most of their adolescence in foster care, according to the report.

Jane Zehnder-Merrell of the Michigan League for Human Services believes Michigan's economy also has played a role in the increase of child maltreatment, especially as the state has cut more social programs when the demand for them increased, she said.

"Families are much more isolated in being able to find services to mitigate the pressures from the economic downturn," said Zehnder-Merrell.

"In families where you have a lot of economic pressures and people are under constant stress and when they are not able to meet all the needs of the family, that's when you end up having kids that are neglected."

Kids Count in Michigan regularly publishes reports on indicators of child well-being, such as poverty, health and education. Among the positive changes to have occurred in the latest report is that fewer Michigan teens are getting arrested for violent or property crimes, and the rates of teenagers giving birth or dying are steadily declining.

However, the state is still faced with some challenges in child maltreatment.

Michigan confirmed that nearly 30,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2004, and 17,000 were removed from their family homes and placed into the foster care system. In 1995, 21,159 children were confirmed victims of maltreatment, and 14,994 were placed in foster care.

Children who are victims of abuse and neglect are at higher risk for teen pregnancy, incarceration, reliance on the welfare system and other social problems, experts say.

"It affects a broad range of societal issues," said Mona Perdue, 20, a Detroit resident who spent five years in foster care and now is in school and working. "When there isn't good policy for youth in care, it affects everyone."

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Published January 11, 2006

Michigan children make gains, data show But neglect, abuse cases up in state, Ingham County

By Susan Vela
Lansing State Journal

Fewer Michigan teens are dying, getting arrested, having babies and dropping out of school, but more children are falling victim to abuse or neglect, according to Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2005, an annual report on the state of Michigan's youth.

The report is set to be released today.

Ingham County ranked among the 10 worst counties in the state for confirmed abuse and neglect cases in 2004. The confirmed number of abuse and neglect cases jumped to 1,037 - or almost 60 percent - from 1995 to 2004.

Across the state, there were 29,737 confirmed cases in 2004, about 40 percent higher than in 1995.

Ingham ranked 11th worst among Michigan counties in 2004 for the number of children placed outside the home - meaning in foster care. Cass County in southwest Michigan had the highest rate among urban counties per 100,000 people at 15.2 percent.

Still, Dean Sienko, Ingham County's medical director, was encouraged by the findings, which indicated that children in the tri-county area often are healthier and in better shape financially and emotionally than the state's youth overall.

"That's a good sign," he said. "I'm encouraged by that. We're doing a lot of good things in this community. It's nice to have data that reinforce that position."

A collaboration between the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children, a child advocacy group, produced the report, which is intended for public-policy development and community action.

"One of the things that's really important about this data book is it's trying to shed some light on youth in transition and how successful we are in transitioning youth to adulthood," said Michele Corey, the community advocacy director for Michigan's Children.

The most recent 2002 poverty data indicates that 14.2 percent of Michigan's children are living in poverty, compared to the same rate for Ingham County, 9.1 percent for Eaton County and 6.6 percent in Clinton County.

In the one- to 14-year-old category, 21.4 of every 100,000 in Michigan died between 2001 and 2003.

Both Ingham and Eaton counties had smaller rates, while Clinton County had a slightly larger rate of 22.2.

About 36 Michigan females per every 1,000, ages 15- to 19-years-old, delivered a child between 2001 and 2003, which was higher than in Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties.

Contact Susan Vela at 702-4248 or svela@lsj.com.
Online

- The Kids Count Michigan Data Book 2005 is available on the Michigan League for Human Services Web site at www.milhs.org.

Report: Fewer teen births, dropouts

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Wednesday, January 11, 2006

By Ron Fonger
rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

GENESEE COUNTY - Fewer babies are being born to teens in the county - a shift that could help reduce poverty in the long term and high school dropout rates immediately.

A new Kids Count in Michigan report says the rate of three of the area's most stubborn problems - births to teens, teen deaths and high school dropouts - all dropped significantly since 1994.

The average number of births to teens ages 15-19 dropped from an average of 1,047 to an average of 736 annually from 1994-96 compared to 2001-03, according to the report. Teen deaths during the same time fell from an average of 32 to an average of 18, and high school dropouts tumbled from 1,119 in 1995-96 to 606 in 2003-04.

"I really don't know for sure" the reasons for the drop in teen births, said Robin Widgery, president and senior research assistant of Social Systems Research Institute. "It could be that the lessons are getting through that this is a problem that creates problems for them and society at large."

SSRI issued a study in 2004 that reported nearly seven of 10 babies born to mothers from Flint were out of wedlock and concluded that reducing that number would help reduce other problems, including the number of poor in the area.

In Lapeer County, the rate of births to teens dropped 24 percent during the same times and the high school dropout rate dropped 32 percent while the rate of deaths to teens increased 5 percent.

Shiawassee County's death rate increased slightly as well - up 12 percent, while the teen birth rate dropped 24 percent and dropouts decreased by 43 percent.

But reports of child safety issues got worse around the state and in the three-county area, according to the report. There were more confirmed victims of abuse and neglect and more children in out-of-home care in 2004 compared to 1995.

Gail Stimson, executive director of Priority Children, said changes in the number of people who are considered "mandated reporters" of abuse or neglect - those required by law to report suspected abuse - may have helped increase that group of numbers.

The generally lower numbers are positive signs, Stimson said of the rest of the report.

QUICK TAKE

Good news on
teens

A new report on
Michigan teens
includes good news
in several areas for
Genesee County.

Here are a few:

BIRTHS TO
GIRLS AGES 15-
19: RATE

DROPPED 30
PERCENT FROM
AN AVERAGE OF
1,047 FROM 1994-
96 TO AN
AVERAGE OF 736
FROM 2001-03.

TEEN DEATHS
(AGES 15-19):
RATE DROPPED
43 PERCENT
FROM AN
AVERAGE OF 32
FROM 1994-96 TO
AN AVERAGE OF
18 FROM 2001-03.

=HIGH SCHOOL
DROPOUTS:
RATE DROPPED
44 PERCENT
FROM AN
AVERAGE OF
1,119 IN 1995-96
TO AN AVERAGE
OF 606 IN 2003-
04.

Source: Kids Count
in Michigan

"That gives us hope," she said, "but even in the ones where we are better, there is much room for improvement."

"This gives us some information to start asking and exploring with," Stimson said. "It really is meant to be a starting point for discussions."

Genesee Intermediate School District Superintendent Thomas Svitkovich said he believes dropout rates are falling as well, even though dropouts are difficult to count - especially in areas like the county, which has a high number of transient students.

Students have more alternatives, including alternative high schools, Svitkovich said, making it easier not to leave school.

Statewide, fewer Michigan teens were dropping out of school, according to the Kids Count report. Arrest rates in the state and the county for children 10-17 also declined, the report said. Kids Count in Michigan is a collaborative project of the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children. Funding for the report comes from sources including foundations and local United Ways, the groups said in a news release.

Hard times hurt kids as well as workers

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

By Sharon Emery
Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Michigan's hard-hit economy has taken a toll not only on workers, but on their children too, a report on child well-being issued today indicates.

Confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect rose nearly 41 percent between 1995 and 2004, according to the latest Kids Count in Michigan report, issued annually as part of a national effort to improve the lives of children.

Some 29,737 Michigan children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2004, up from 21,159 in 1995 when the state's economy was humming, says the report funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, and local United Ways.

"Many families with low-wage workers struggle to make ends meet as housing, transportation and utility costs have skyrocketed in recent years. ...That creates stress within the family that's unrelenting," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate for the Michigan League for Human Services, which helped develop the report with the advocacy group Michigan's Children. Such families often slip into neglect when working parents can't afford day care and leave children without proper supervision, for example, Zehnder-Merrell said. At the same time, cash-strapped governments have cut social programs.

"Unfortunately, the gradual erosion in federal and state funding for these critical programs (child care subsidies, cash assistance, Medicaid) has contributed to widespread and severe economic insecurity among fragile families with children," the report says.

The \$459 maximum monthly welfare grant for a mom and two kids in Michigan, for instance, hasn't been increased since 1993. And there are Republican-led efforts in the Legislature to cut families off assistance after 48 months.

Child poverty stood at 14 percent in Michigan in 2002, and rose to 18 percent in 2004, according to the American Community Survey cited in the report. In 2004, the federal poverty level for a two-parent family with two kids was about \$19,300.

Indeed, neglect and abuse often coincide with poverty. Livingston County, among the wealthier counties in the state, had a child poverty rate of 4 percent in 2004 and a 28.6-per-1,000 rate of children in homes investigated for abuse or neglect.

Contrast that with Lake County, perhaps the poorest in the state, which had a child poverty rate of nearly 28 percent and a 133-per-1,000 rate of children in investigated homes.

Across Michigan, the number of children in families investigated by the state for abuse or neglect rose from 139,260 in 1995 to 157,693 nine years later, a 13 percent increase.

Abuse and neglect can cause physical harm, depression, eating disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. Some research suggests that those maladies also affect children in cases where abuse or neglect is investigated but not confirmed, according to the report. So prevention and follow-up services are key.

"By providing services and resources to mitigate the factors associated with poverty and the mental health of parents, Michigan could substantially reduce the conditions that lead to abuse or neglect of children," the report concludes.

But funding cutbacks have virtually eliminated Department of Human Services prevention efforts targeted at families with unsubstantiated charges of child abuse or neglect, according to the report. Staffing needs to be increased by 20 percent, so caseworkers aren't stretched so thin. Jim Nye, director of field operations for DHS, acknowledges the loss of one in five DHS workers since 1997 due to early retirement, but says the state has made child protection a priority and is "doing a good job of identifying families at high risk for abuse."

He said prevention money allocated to counties has not changed substantially in recent years.

Kids needing homes get spotlight

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

By Ted Roelofs

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS TOWNSHIP -- The stories can be heartbreaking: broken homes, abuse, neglect, abandonment.

But then look at the faces of a few of the children in the state's foster care system: Smiling, bright, full of hope for the future. Captured by some of the best photographers in the state, a photo exhibit of about 60 children awaiting adoption opens today at Celebration Cinema North, along the East Beltline Avenue at Knapp Street NE.

Grand Rapids photographer Mike Morin was glad to have a hand in the exhibit aimed at opening hearts and minds to the need for adoptive parents.

"It's hard to put into words. But for any kid, to have a permanent home, that's invaluable. "To give them a stable living environment is probably the greatest thing you could give these kids," said Morin, who captured the image of a boy named Richard for the exhibit, called the Michigan Heart Gallery.

The traveling images are a collaborative effort of the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Adoptive Family Support Network in Grand Rapids and the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. Inspired by a similar showing in New Mexico in 2001, it opened in Lansing in November and is slated to travel to Detroit, Flint and several other locations.

Kenyon Kopp of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange said the hope is to inspire more people to become adoptive parents.

"We really want people to know there are hundreds, thousands of children that need homes right here in our back yard," Kopp said.

"We hope ultimately to find homes for the children who are featured."

According to the Michigan Department of Human Services, there are more than 18,000 children in the state's foster care system, including 903 in Kent County and 173 in Ottawa County.

Many will be returned to their families or to relatives, but many others languish in the system for years. There are about 300 children approved for adoption, many of them 6 or older and many of those black boys.

There is a chronic shortage of minority families to adopt minority children.

Grand Rapids Press photographer Rex Larsen added a photo of a young man named Coty, 12. Larsen said it was the least he could do to raise awareness for this need.

"I grew up in a family with two loving parents and benefited from a close family life," Larsen said.

"When I hear about kids who don't have parents or even worse, suffered abuse and neglect, I really feel for them. It sounded like a nice way to do something, not only for the kids but to show their need in a visual way."

Grand Rapids photographer Christine Gribble photographed a boy named Rozelle, 11, near the Lake Michigan shoreline.

She wound up with a smiling portrait of him, a display of happiness that surprised his social worker.

Gribble felt like she was just bringing out what was there all the time.

"I like to show people's personality and not just what they look like," Gribble said. That's how photographer Morin felt when he took the image of Richard, which he shot at a session in late October at John Ball Park. It shows him with a relaxed smile, leaning on a tree. "He's a great kid, a talkative kid," Morin said. "He wasn't shy at all. "I was a little nervous on whether I would be able to get his personality out for the photo."

Father to Face Felony Child Abuse Charges

By Anu Prakash

Web produced by Sarah Morgan

January 11, 2006

Trenton Police said it was the worst case of child abuse they have ever seen and on Wednesday, a downriver man will face felony charges.

According to investigators, the baby's injuries were consistent with a baby who went through the wind shield of a car driven at 50 miles per hour. Her injuries resemble shaken baby syndrome. Investigators said the baby was nearly shaken to death by her 25-year-old father from 2-weeks-old until she was 2-months-old.

The child spent almost a month a Children's Hospital fighting to stay alive. She suffered from seizures, brain swelling, a broken skull and 11 broken bones.

The baby is now 6-months-old and out of the hospital, being cared for by her maternal grandparents. She will likely suffer vision damage and damage to her motor skills, but it is still too early to tell.

At this point, investigators have no idea why the abuse occurred. Her mother had no knowledge of the abuse and is not facing any charges

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

Dad charged in baby's slaying Police say Detroit man killed infant son because he wouldn't stop crying; he could get life in prison.

David G. Grant and Eric Lacy / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Deric LaValle Davis' knees buckled as police led him into 36th District Court on Tuesday, where he was arraigned on felony murder charges in the death of his 4-month-old son. "Can I get the death penalty for what I did?" he asked the officers, who held the slightly built 19-year-old up by his arms.

Davis, whom neighbors described as a stern but attentive father, was charged with suffocating his son, Sivad Davis, in his bassinet Sunday night in the family's apartment in the 1000 block of East Jefferson, near downtown Detroit.

Davis told homicide investigators that he killed Sivad because he would not stop crying and his mother refused to help him with the baby, according to police reports filed at the arraignment. They said Davis put elastic gauze over his son's head and used sports wrist bands to tie his hands and feet so he could not move.

They also said Sivad's mother, whose name has been withheld pending completion of the investigation, was in the apartment at the time listening to music with headphones on.

"I can't believe that one little baby would cause so many problems that you would want to kill him," said Darnell Armstrong, a neighbor of Davis' in the apartment building. "It's unbelievable because he just seemed like a guy that was trying to start his life out on the right foot."

He appeared to be attentive and caring for his son, said Armstrong, who does maintenance at the apartment building.

Davis worked 10-hour days, seven days a week at a nearby bar and regularly had packages of diapers and other baby supplies delivered to the apartment, Armstrong said.

"He would tell me about how much of a deal it was to use the Internet," he said. "He really seemed to care about that child."

Still, there seemed to be something wrong in the family.

Armstrong, who has an 8-month-old son, met the couple and child the day they moved into the building last fall.

He suggested to Davis that they should spend some time together with their children since they both were new fathers.

But Armstrong said Davis denied his request and said: "I don't even let my own family see my baby."

That's when Armstrong decided to keep his distance.

"Anybody with common sense can tell if they like a person by the first conversation they have with them," Armstrong said. "(After talking with him), I just decided to keep my words real short after that."

Armstrong said that about 10:30 p.m. Sunday, he heard screams from the third floor. He rushed down from his sixth floor apartment to see what was going on and heard more screams: "The baby isn't breathing." He said he heard a woman's voice coming from the Davis apartment. Emergency Medical Service arrived minutes later and took the baby to the hospital, where Sivad was pronounced dead on arrival and doctors reported signs of previous injuries to the child's body.

"By the time the baby was downstairs, I think it was too late," Armstrong said.

Another neighbor, 17-year-old Larry Jackson, saw Davis immediately after his girlfriend screamed.

Jackson encountered Davis in a hallway and asked "What's up?"

Davis didn't reply.

"He seemed to have an attitude like something happened," Jackson said. "He just had a grim look on his face and didn't say a word."

Jackson said Davis and his girlfriend never made much noise in their apartment.

"They never fought or caused problems," Jackson said. "I don't know what got into him."

Magistrate Charles W. Anderson III entered a not-guilty plea for Davis at his arraignment and ordered him held in the Wayne County Jail without bond pending his Jan. 23 preliminary examination.

If Davis is convicted of the charges, he would face life in prison without the possibility of parole.

You can reach David G. Grant at (313) 222-2696 or dgrant@detnews.com.

Father Charged With Death Of 5-Month-Old Son

Child May Have Choked; Autopsy Scheduled

POSTED: 6:45 pm EST January 10, 2006

A father is charged with the death of his 5-month-old son, Local 4 reported.

Derrick Davis was seen in handcuffs Tuesday being taken from police headquarters and was expected to appear in Detroit court Tuesday evening.

Police believe that Davis harmed the baby in an apartment on Jefferson and East Rivard when it wouldn't stop crying. The child reportedly choked and then died.

The baby was rushed to Children's Hospital Sunday night, where he later died.

An autopsy was scheduled to determine the cause of the baby's death.

Police took Davis into custody at the hospital.

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Mom arrested after 1-year-old son stabbed

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com 388-7784

A woman who police believe stabbed her 1-year-old son at her mother's Decatur home just before it caught on fire was in jail this morning, authorities said.

Decatur police were called to the South Williams Street residence about 5:20 p.m. Tuesday after the suspect's mother called the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office and told a dispatcher that her daughter had just cut her baby, Police Chief David McLeese said.

Seconds later, dispatchers got several calls reporting that the house was on fire.

McLeese said the toddler, his mother and grandmother had safely evacuated the residence by the time officers arrived, but a "tremendous amount" of smoke was billowing from the two-story farmhouse and flames could be seen coming from two sections.

McLeese said authorities determined that the boy had been stabbed once in the stomach. He was treated at the scene by officers until rescue workers arrived and was reported to be in stable condition this morning at Bronson Methodist Hospital.

McLeese said police recovered a butcher knife that is believed to be the weapon used in the incident.

The boy's mother, whose name was not released, was arrested at the scene. She was to be arraigned today in Van Buren County District Court on an assault charge.

Authorities planned to return to the house today to investigate the cause of the fire, which McLeese said resulted in "extensive damage." Investigators also planned to interview the boy's grandmother. The boy's mother refused to make any statements following the incident, McLeese said.

Published January 11, 2006

State's Amber Alerts to be broadcast in more efficient way

\$77K AT&T grant puts equipment in TV, radio stations

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Beginning as early as next month, Amber Alerts in Michigan will be sent over the state's emergency broadcast system - publicizing missing children cases more quickly and efficiently, officials said.

The state's Amber Alert program is a cooperative effort between law enforcement and media to help immediately send out information about endangered missing children.

Under a new system announced Tuesday in Lansing, every television and radio station in the state will be equipped to receive the alerts, said Karole White, president of the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

"It goes immediately across, just as if there were a tornado," she said, explaining that an alert will interrupt radio programming and scroll as text at the bottom of TV screens.

State police and officials from several agencies announced the upgrade at a press conference at Lansing's Boys and Girls Club. It was made possible by a \$77,000 grant from AT&T Michigan.

Michigan State Police, after receiving information from law enforcement agencies investigating a missing child case, now use fax technology to send alerts to the media. Faxes are less reliable and don't always go out like they're supposed to, state police Capt. Dan Atkinson said.

The new system, he said, "will be more timely and accurate - and more effective."

Since the beginning of the program in Michigan in June 2001, Amber Alerts have been activated for 133 children, and 127 have been found, Atkinson said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.
History of the system

- The Amber Alert system began in 1996 when Dallas-Fort Worth broadcasters teamed with local police to develop an early warning system to help find abducted children. All

50 states now have an Amber Alert plan. The plan was created as a legacy to nine-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnaped in Arlington, Texas, and then brutally murdered.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

Amber Alert equipment gets upgrade

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

LaNIA COLEMAN
THE SAGINAW NEWS

AT&T Michigan has awarded a \$77,000 grant to upgrade the technology used to broadcast Amber Alerts in the state.

"What a great idea," Saginaw County Sheriff Charles L. Brown said at a Tuesday press conference at the Boys and Girls Club of Saginaw County, 907 E. Remington in Saginaw. Michigan's Amber Alert plan, which took effect in June 2001, is a cooperative effort between law enforcement and the Michigan Association of Broadcasters to quickly publicize cases of abducted or endangered missing children.

The system uses fax machines to send alerts to the media. Someone has to spot the fax, then arrange to have the information aired.

The upgrades will tap into the state's Emergency Alert System to distribute alerts over AM/FM radios. Anyone listening to a radio will hear a special tone designed to indicate an active alert, followed by a pre-recorded message with the alert information.

Saginaw Police Chief Gerald H. Cliff applauded the new system for its swift and efficient method of getting the word out.

"The faster we can get that information out there, the faster we can recover the child," Cliff said. "It's all a matter of time."

Besides broadcasting the alerts over the radio, the upgraded system also will simultaneously page the more than 3,300 AT&T field technicians and managers who travel state roadways.

Police have activated the Amber Alert 133 times with 127 children safely returned since the plan was enacted. Last year, alerts were broadcast for 47 endangered missing children.

In May, Saginaw police issued an Amber Alert for an 8-year-old boy who failed to return home from school. The youngster turned up safe the next day at a friend's home.

Teen found guilty of murder in death of 2-year-old

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

By John Agar
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Melvina Hockett has trouble imagining her grandson's last hours.

Armon Colar, 2, was beaten so badly his brain swelled and bled, and a bone in his arm was broken. He had bruises, a broken rib and internal injuries from squeezing.

So, when a Kent County jury found her grandson's killer, LeeClifton Moore, 18, guilty Tuesday of first-degree murder, she and her family felt little joy.

"I'm still confused as to why. I still want to know why," she said. "We pray a lot. We deal with this through the help of God."

Jurors deliberated about two hours after listening to horrific testimony about the boy's death.

Moore faces life in prison without parole when sentenced next month.

As the verdict was read by Circuit Judge Dennis Kolenda, someone behind Moore said, "No."

The victim's parents, Alicia and Anthony Colar, embraced.

As the jury left, Moore stayed seated, staring ahead, as everyone else in court stood. Everyone is supposed to rise.

"I feel sorry for his family, too," Hockett said later. "He's older than Armon was, but, in a way, it's like he's a child."

Her son walked to the other side of the courtroom and hugged the defendant's father.

The Colars had separated when Moore moved into her apartment on Bradford Street NE. She also lived with her son and two older daughters.

Pellston expells student

BY KIRSTEN FREDRICKSON NEWS-REVIEW STAFF WRITER

Tuesday, January 10, 2006 2:29 PM EST

PELLSTON - A 14-year-old former Pellston High School student will now never be able to return to the district after he threatened a fellow student with a knife.

Pellston School Board officials Monday permanently expelled John Lee from the school district for an incident that occurred more than a month ago. The vote was unanimous. Only Diane Burkhart was absent.

Just two weeks after new surveillance cameras were installed in the school last November, Lee was caught on camera holding a fold-out razor blade knife to the throat of a student who was sticking up for another. A faculty member quickly intervened and the Emmet County Sheriff's Office responded to the incident.

High school principal Terry Emery said a hearing between school officials and the student's parents was held to discuss the expulsion but "they chose not to show up." She had been informed the former student is already attending an alternative education program.

"I talked to mom on the phone and she said they were not going to appeal (the expulsion)," Emery said.

No one representing the student, including his parents, attended Monday's board meeting. John Lee was arrested and charged with felonious assault, or assault with a deadly weapon, and a weapons free school zone violation. A pre-trial hearing, to determine if the case will go to trial, is scheduled for today, Tuesday.

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Girl ousted after threat to Macomb Co. school

January 11, 2006

BY CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The Chippewa Valley Board of Education has expelled a 12-year-old girl accused of sending instant messages online last month threatening to blow up her school.

The decision was made after board members discussed the matter in a closed session Monday. They found the seventh-grader at Wyandot Middle School in Clinton Township guilty of violating the district's code of conduct. The expulsion, which became effective Monday, is for the remainder of the school year.

"Decisions like this can be difficult, especially when you are dealing with a young student that clearly didn't realize the serious consequences and lasting implications associated with making a false threat," Superintendent Mark Deldin said in a statement. "However, the safety and security of every student is our No. 1 priority, and we must continue to do everything in our power to ensure that our schools are safe."

According to Diane Blain, district spokeswoman, the girl's parents reserve the right to appeal the decision, but school officials don't believe they will. The girl's mother attended the meeting Monday.

The girl is charged with using a computer to commit a false report or threat of terrorism. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment, but authorities expect a juvenile court judge to take her age into consideration.

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Prenatal care a lingering battle

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

By Brian Wheeler

bwheeler@citpat.com -- 768-4928

A report out today says fewer expectant mothers in Jackson County get proper medical care than in any Michigan county, a problem that local health officials say they are fixing.

The Kids Count in Michigan report says more than half of expecting mothers -- 50.7 percent -- didn't see doctors enough during their pregnancies. The Michigan average was dramatically lower, 21.7 percent.

The good news for Jackson County, health officials agree, is that the local numbers are off target, largely the result of clerical problems.

"Since we've been working on the issue, we've corroborated our feeling that the information doesn't reflect what's happening in the community," said Dr. Amy Schultz, who chairs a local task force looking at prenatal care.

Foote Hospital hadn't filled out birth certificates fully when information from physicians didn't arrive, Schultz said. Doctors' offices also had to be counseled to provide more information.

Since that was fixed in 2004, the number of mothers who don't get adequate prenatal care has fallen, to about one-quarter. That's above -- but much closer to -- Michigan's average. The Kids Count report doesn't show that improvement because it relies on 3-year-old data.

Making sure would-be parents get proper medical care is no small worry. Regular visits to a physician or midwife help head off problems, health experts say.

Expecting mothers should see a health professional in the first trimester and make at least nine medical visits for a full-term pregnancy, the National Center for Health Statistics says.

Shadia Fogel of Spring Arbor gave birth to a boy two-and-a-half years ago and is expecting another child in March. She started seeing an obstetrician regularly near the start of both pregnancies.

Is that level of care unusual? Hardly. Fogel needs only to look around her.

"I'm in a moms' (play) group with about seven other pregnant women," Fogel said, "and they are all talking about their doctors."

If the reality is better than the numbers, that hardly satisfies everyone. Jackson resident Heather Shemanski had her fourth girl in July but voiced frustration at long waits to see her obstetrician and the absence of independent midwives who have privileges to deliver at Foote.

"I'm disappointed in the Jackson area as far as the midwives go," Shemanski said.

"Part of the issue with Jackson is we have a huge level of poverty and not enough resources," said Julia Hitchingham, a social worker who gave birth to her second child last summer. "And for those of us who have options, there are not great options around."

It's not clear that frustration, however, has kept parents from getting proper medical care.

Schultz, who heads the prenatal task force, said she hopes a survey of new mothers at Foote will yield insight into barriers that keep expecting parents out of the doctor's office.

Those results likely will yield changes. A national effort called Healthy People 2010 is encouraging communities to ensure that at least nine of every 10 mothers get adequate prenatal care. That sets a challenging benchmark for Jackson County.

"Even if we're seeing around 70 percent," Schultz said, "there's still room for improvement."

ROCHELLE RILEY: Aging out, but still in need

January 11, 2006

BY ROCHELLE RILEY
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

We can no longer afford not to care.

Hundreds of youths age out of foster care each year in Michigan, many to live on their own, without the support, education or social skills to do it successfully.

Some kids who have lived *healthy* lives can't manage on their own at 18 or even 21, but we expect these broken, emotionally battered kids to do it on their own after having left the only family they've known for years -- the state.

If I don't have your attention yet, consider this: A report funded by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative paints a bleak picture. "Aging Out: A Guide for Youth Communities, Employees," found that after four years out of the system, fewer than half of these young people even graduate from high school, compared to 85% of 18- to 24-year-olds; and nearly two-thirds have not kept a job for a year.

Additionally, fewer than one in five can support themselves; more than 25% have spent time in jail; four of 10 have become parents; and at least a quarter have, at some point, been homeless.

A need to re-establish trust

John Seita, an assistant professor at Michigan State University's School of Social Work, spent half his childhood in foster care before aging out. He says the state is failing these kids, partly because of money, partly because officials don't seem to know what they need.

"It's important to remember that kids don't go into foster care voluntarily. It's not camp," he said.

"They're there because they're abused and neglected. They have a whole host of issues, trust issues with adults, trust issues of others, their own sense of self, their own place and families. When they leave foster care, many of those issues haven't been resolved."

As of New Year's Eve, 10,011 Michigan children were living in foster care, in shelters, institutions, detention, jails and foster homes. More than half, 5,838, were between 14 and 21 years old. In Michigan, young people are required to leave the system when they turn 21, but most leave sooner because they are released by the courts or at their own request.

We spend millions documenting every aspect of the cars that come off the assembly line or out of the concept shop, sometimes before they're ready. But the state doesn't even keep up with the aged-out kids who fall off the state line before they're ready, mostly without health care or adequate education or social skills. Instead, we tell them to go forth and prosper.

A state full of parents

We can no longer afford to ignore them. This must be the year when we improve the lives of children whose parents have been the State of Michigan and its residents. Yes, that's us.

For the next 18 months, I will bring you stories of children preparing to enter adulthood without help -- or in some cases, without income or advice from adults they respect. You'll learn about their fears, their needs, their failures and their successes.

Listen to them talk about making it anyway, or at least trying anyway. I dare you not to care. And when you've really gotten to know them, I dare you not to do something about it.

Therapist addresses teen dating violence

By Christy Strawser

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: January 11, 2006

ROYAL OAK — Dr. Jill Murray, an author, family therapist and "Oprah" guest, will deliver a series of local talks this week on teen dating violence and she wants the public to leave with one message: If a partner makes you feel bad, it's not love.

"Love is a behavior, not a feeling," she said. "We need to start teaching kids that love is the way someone treats you 24/7. Hanging onto your cell phone all night while he calls over and over and begs and threatens suicide, there's no way to say that's loving behavior."

Murray comes here from Laguna Beach, Calif. courtesy of HAVEN, the local domestic violence shelter and support network for women and children.

The doctor said dating violence against teens is skyrocketing to the point that one in three girls and one in five boys experience it.

"It's up, way, way up," she said, adding, "I put a lot of responsibility on the dreadful teen media the kids are involved in. They get nearly constant messages of disrespect, lack of authority, disrespect for themselves.

"Girls present themselves as highly sexual, scantily clad dancing on the hood of some disreputable guy's black Escalade. It's flattering now to be called some guy's 'bitch.'"

Murray hopes to dispel that notion of love during her three talks.

HAVEN will host the community events with Murray on teen dating violence and each is designed to cater to a different audience.

Teens and parents, the community, and professionals will be targeted — so by the end the area is blanketed with enough information to fight the spread of violence.

n The first event will be from 6:30-8 p.m. today in the auditorium at William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak. Murray will hold a free discussion forum for teens and parents focused on how to spot the warning signs of abuse and how parents can intervene. Murray will explore teen relationships, show a "20/20" video and discuss the role of media in promoting or discouraging dating violence

n From 8-9:30 a.m. Thursday, HAVEN will host a breakfast meeting at the Community House in Birmingham where Murray will discuss how teen dating violence affects the community at large. The cost is \$25.

n The final event will be from 11:30-2:30 p.m. Thursday at Oakland Schools with professionals. Topics include the warning signs of an abusive relationship, exploring teen relationships, the role of the media, interventions, and how to help teens. The cost is \$20.

Murray got involved in combating teen dating violence about nine years ago when she worked at a domestic violence shelter. She said she saw the same pattern over and over.

"I found that every single one of them began an abusive relationship in later high school and kept going from creep to creep," Murray said.

"When we got her she was maybe 23 or 24 years old and had already gone through it."

Murray said people need to understand that not all abuse is physical. She sees teens who are humiliated, berated, and completely possessed by a jealous partner.

"You can be 15 years old and a practiced abuser," she said. "It's jealousy, isolation, being interrogated, being blamed, being possessive, having to answer multiple text messages every night, not having privacy, all of that kind of stuff wears a girl down."

HAVEN staffers are happy about the excitement Murray brings to the topic of teen dating violence. She has appeared on 200 television shows, including "Oprah," and has written three books.

"It is our hope at HAVEN that by hosting Dr. Murray, a leading expert on the subject of teen dating violence, we will be able to make a positive impact on the lives of these young people," said Beth Morrison of HAVEN.

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Our View: State's torture law unneeded, too vague

Midland Daily News

01/10/2006

The crime in Michigan's Huron County was horrific.

Authorities discovered a husband who, in effect, was torturing his diabetic wife by not giving her needed medication and a proper diet so her sugar levels would drop. As she neared unconsciousness, he would dress her in provocative clothing, tie her hands and asphyxiate her until she was nearly dead, an Associated Press report of the crime stated.

When Prosecuting Attorney Mark J. Gaertner went to press charges against the man, he discovered Michigan did not have a law making torture a crime. So he had to charge the husband with kidnapping and 17 counts of first degree abuse.

The man was convicted and now faces up to life in prison.

Lawmakers heard about the case and passed a bill making torture a crime in Michigan, carrying a life sentence in prison. That bill was signed into law last week by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

This is not the first time a sensational and offensive incident has caused government to pass a new law specifically prohibiting a certain type of criminal behavior. In the past we have questioned whether all of these new laws are necessary. We have the same question with this case.

The new law will carry a life sentence in prison. The husband convicted in this case -- using existing laws -- faces a life sentence in prison. The jury agreed the man was guilty of kidnapping and first degree abuse. Will having the torture law on the books make future convictions easier? Or will it muddy the legal waters?

The answers will be revealed when this new law comes into play in a Michigan courtroom in the future.

The Need to Invest in Young Children

By TAMAR LEWIN
The New York Times

Published: January 11, 2006

This week's trip to New York could have been billed as a victory lap for Beverley Hughes, the British minister of state for children, young people and families.

For while many American educators and policy experts have spent four decades in a slow push for universal prekindergarten programs and affordable child care, Britain's Labor government has leapt into the full agenda.

American proponents of early childhood programs have long swooned over the support for families with young children offered in France, Belgium, Italy and the Scandinavian countries, but until recently, Britain had no place on their most-admired list.

Just a decade ago, when America's Head Start preschool program for low-income families was already 30 years old, Britain had nothing of the kind. But now, Sure Start, its version of Head Start, is expanding rapidly, while the United States government is considering budget cuts for Head Start.

Other British efforts have whooshed past anything the United States has planned: A free part-time universal preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds is in place in Britain and it is genuinely universal, with virtually all 4-year-olds and about 95 percent of 3-year-olds enrolled.

The British are creating a system of extended 8 a.m.-to-6 p.m. schools, offering affordable child care for children 3 to 14, plus homework clubs, music lessons, sports and more. And since 1997, when the Labor government came in, Britain has created more than 1.2 million new child care places and adopted national day care standards, something lacking in the United States.

So despite her restrained tone, Minister Hughes was a sort of motivational speaker yesterday, talking up her government's approach in a keynote speech at a New York conference intended to build support for government funding of early childhood programs. The conference, "Building the Economic Case for Investments in Preschool," was sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development, a group of business executives and university presidents; the Pew Charitable Trust; and the PNC Financial Services Group.

American advocacy groups, business executives and child care experts have for years been producing conferences, research papers and studies showing that investment in high-quality preschool programs more than pays its way - both during the school years, when it leads to fewer

dropouts and special education referrals and more on-time high school graduations, and for years thereafter, when it leads to higher earnings, lower rates of teenage pregnancy and arrests. For the conference organizers, the intent yesterday was to reframe the warm, fuzzy image of early childhood programs, transforming them into a hardheaded, quantifiable matter of economics and work force efficiency.

To that end, James J. Heckman, a Nobel Prize-winning economics professor from the University of Chicago, discussed his findings that investments in preschool programs for disadvantaged children bring far higher returns than investments later in the life span, like reduced pupil-teacher ratios, job training, convict rehabilitation or tuition subsidies.

And Isabel Sawhill, director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit Washington-based policy organization, estimated that investment in universal preschool would increase the gross domestic product by \$988 billion within 60 years. It is not an easy sell for politicians, she noted, because the initial investment is relatively high and it takes years to reap the benefits.

"We're a big country, bigger than England, so it takes a long time to penetrate the public consciousness," said Charles E.M. Kolb, president of the Committee for Economic Development. "The British get it. The French get it. We're the largest economy in the world and it's outrageous that we don't get it yet. But I'm optimistic."

At the state level, 14 states increased their preschool funding by \$300 million in 2004, and last year there were increases in 26 states, totaling \$600 million.

And this year, the British government generated enthusiasm. "We are thrilled, and awed, by our colleagues in the U.K.," said Sara Watson of Pew.

Indeed, when Ms. Hughes finished outlining her government's programs, Mr. Kolb asked the first question. "It is rumored that your prime minister and our president sometimes talk to each other," he said, pausing briefly before going on to ask whether she might be able to suggest to the prime minister that he bring up the issue with President Bush.

But as a practical matter, in this country, government support for early childhood programs has been slow to catch on.

"Quite frankly, we're not making a lot of progress," said Jim Rohr, the chief executive of PNC.

"Across the country, we're not getting the job done. This issue is not as high a priority as it should be."

About 700,000 American preschoolers are now in state-financed prekindergarten classes, and about 800,000 in Head Start, but that is only about 20 percent of the population. And while most states now offer some preschool programs for poor children, paying for effective programs remains problematic almost everywhere. New York, for example, instituted universal prekindergarten years ago but funded only a fraction of what it would take to actually provide it. To some extent, the history of the issue has continued to shape the debate. Thirty-five years ago, Congress passed legislation that would have underwritten preschool nationwide, but President Richard M. Nixon vetoed the legislation, refusing to encourage "communal approaches to child rearing over the family-centered approach"

"I don't think we've ever recovered from that veto message," said John Brademas, president emeritus of New York University, and, as a former Democratic congressman from Illinois, a sponsor of that legislation.

At yesterday's conference, Zogby International presented the results of a new survey finding that more than four out of five American business leaders support publicly funded prekindergarten,

stressing that parental choice is a core American value and that it is voluntary prekindergarten that the leaders want to see.

The very fact that so many business leaders are getting involved in the issue is a big step forward, some advocates say.

"It's a long uphill battle, but we're getting a little traction, from new constituents," said Augusta Souza Kappner, president of the Bank Street College of Education. "For a business-based group like the Committee for Economic Development to come close to saying we must raise taxes to support early childhood education is something important. They've signed on in a major way." Ms. Hughes, meanwhile, said that in Britain she had no doubts that the Labor government's programs would live on no matter which party was in office. "I think the ground has shifted in the U.K. to such an extent, with what's being provided already, that it would be very difficult to move back from what we have," she said.

Grand Rapids Press

Letters

January 11, 2006

No lifetime limits

In recent weeks, amidst letters to The Press regarding church closings on Christmas, another Christmas drama has been playing out. A package of laws from local legislators Rep. Jerry Kooiman and Sen. Bill Hardiman would have capped state aid for the poor at a lifetime limit of four years.

A Press editorial praised the effort, noting other states put time limits on aid. "Join the crowd" arguments are the weakest support for any position, and have nothing to do with justice and sound policy. I believe that a four-year lifetime cap on aid is bad policy, and Gov. Granholm was right to veto this legislation.

I am a Christian. I strive to follow one who declared he had come with good news for the poor. Today, unemployment in Michigan is high, and good jobs are vanishing daily. At the same time, Sen. Hardiman publicly opposes raising the minimum wage, and Rep. Kooiman says that some welfare recipients need "incentives" to seek self-sufficiency. These positions are nothing but bad news for the poor, working or otherwise.

These proposed laws would have hit minorities hardest. The effects of lifetime limits on aid would go further. If we permanently reject the poor for not performing adequately we all will bear the costs in increased crime, violence and human misery.

DAVID LaGRAND
Grand Rapids

David LaGrand is a Democratic candidate for the state Senate in the 29th District. -- The Editor

Expert tells parents how to teach kids to give to charity

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

By Juanita Westaby
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Parents, it's time to have the talk. Not the one about sex, the one about selling all that stuff to raise money for -- oh, whatever -- at your child's school.

Whatever the flier says it's about, it's not about charity.

"Talk about raising money for yourself, or for trips and things like that," charity expert Kathy Agard advised. But emphasize such fundraising is not the same as philanthropy."

The former "engages children, really, in marketing and sales," Agard told members of the Grand Rapids Junior League on Tuesday, to lots of knowing nods and groans. "I'm not sure it's such a great thing in fundraising and altruism."

Agard, who runs Learning to Give in Muskegon, a nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching children how to become charitable, said, "It's different when we give money to the homeless shelter, or the zoo or the unknown other."

The unknown other is key to Agard's research-based philosophy about philanthropy. A parent who teaches their child empathy for others' feelings is well on the way to having a charitable child. What helps even more is to have Agard's gentle suggestions at their side.

As a parent reading bedtime stories, "you can point out, 'Who was the character that was hurt?' 'Who helped?' 'Why did they help?' "

The next generation of children will have to be well-versed in giving their time, talent and treasure because all of the other sources of "social capital" are plunging south, she noted. Voting, affiliations in clubs, even entertaining in one's own home is down by 45 percent, in some cases, from 40 years ago.

"The social glue, or banked good will, that helps social cohesion" is eroding, she said. "This is one of our challenges in this country, agreeing on places where we'll help for the common good." Parents need to model generous behavior for their children, and empower them to think about and act on their own charitable ideas as much as possible.

Plan pushes hike in minimum wage

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

By Steven Harmon
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Democrats have a proposal of their own they want to get on the November ballot.

It would raise the minimum wage above the \$5.15 federal rate to \$6.85 an hour, and index future increases to inflation. Kent County Democrats are kicking off the ballot drive Wednesday at a public meeting at the Wealthy Street Theatre, from 6:30 to 9:15 p.m.

The statewide campaign to raise the minimum wage for the first time since 1997 will kick off on Thursday. The ballot language has yet to be finalized. Supporters will have about six months to collect more than 317,000 valid signatures to get the measure on the general election ballot.

"We're going to the people because the Legislature has been unwilling to address the issue," said John Otterbacher, a former state legislator who is a member of the organizing committee for the West Michigan ballot campaign.

"Most average citizens are genuinely compassionate and don't have a hard time understanding that if you're to move people from welfare to work, you've got to have a job with a wage that will support life," Otterbacher said.

Republicans are likely to oppose the ballot, said Karl Hascall, Kent County Republican Party vice chairman.

"Generally, the party feels the market should control what wages are," he said.

Grand Rapids City Commissioner Robert Dean, a minister, will talk about the morality of the minimum wage.

"Those in power get a cost-of-living increase, yet people making minimum wage have not in how many years?" Dean said.